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Feature Article - Public art

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Public art in Tasmania could be described as art which is shown in public places, rather than in art galleries or private collections. Apart from monuments and civic statuary there is a rich assortment of public art in Tasmania. Much of this is the result of the State Government's Art for Public Buildings Scheme. The Scheme was the first such scheme in Australia and has been running for fifteen years. In operation the scheme allows for 1% of the cost of new or refurbished buildings (up to a ceiling of \$20,000) to be allocated to the purchase of artworks for the site. Many of the projects undertaken are within the Department of Education and the Arts, and the majority of these are in schools.

The Scheme is administered by the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board through Arts Tasmania, the State Government's policy and funding body. The Scheme is facilitated by the services of consultants from the private sector, with overall management of the Scheme conducted by Arts Tasmania. Approximately 35 projects were current in 1995 on a State-wide basis, employing up to 40 artists at any time.

Among the many innovations of the Scheme is an increasing involvement of artists at the earliest stages of project development. This allows for a closer and more complete involvement with the architect and building user in determining the most appropriate artwork placement for the site. Most of the artworks are commissions, not purchases, and therefore they often reflect the ideas and needs of the various stakeholders through a strongly consultative focus, resulting in some highly innovative designs. As well as traditional media like painting and sculpture, artists have been employed to design floor patterns, playground equipment, shelters, interactive works, ceramic murals and signage. In recent cases such as the Government Analyst Laboratories, the 'cutting edge' computer-based digital imaging processes have been employed. The artforms utilised also employ the work of the excellent furniture designers and craftspeople in Tasmania, as in the Hobart Magistrates Court, in which the furniture has been custom designed for the project.

In 1995 a landmark project was completed that employed the services of three artists and the architect as a design team, addressing all aspects of the building. This was the Futures Technology Centre at Elizabeth College in which the artwork component is not immediately identifiable as it is embedded in the whole design concept. The artists on this project designed floor patterns, oxide-coloured exterior cement wall panels and signage.

Artists are also working closely with interpretive teams on a number of projects which require consideration of heritage and wilderness concerns. The Lake St Clair Visitor Centre is an example of artists working closely with Parks and Wildlife officers to identify and interpret the values and history of our national parks.

Other recent developments in public art have been the completion of a major monument at the site of the old Women's Prison or 'Female Factory' in South Hobart and opportunities for major

civic art placements in the redeveloped Elizabeth Mall and Wapping in Hobart.

Many centres within the State are now evaluating the need to undertake townscape studies to improve towns and cities and to identify and interpret the heritage of the centre or the region. Such studies usually involve the input of artists working alongside architects, urban designers and landscape architects resulting in the integration of art into many aspects of town and city redevelopment. These developments not only provide employment for many artists and designers but also bring the experience of art to many people who may not normally encounter it.

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